

## Stealth Promotions How to Use Them to Get Ahead in Today's Business World

Promotions used to be easy to recognize. You worked hard, showed you could do your job well, were willing to take on more responsibility and you were promoted. You told your spouse and then your Mom, especially your Mom, and had a party. Everything was nice and clear. Everyone knew you were promoted and what your new job was.

Today's world of flat organization structures, fewer management jobs, self-managed teams, larger units, broader management spans of control, an intense focus on continually increasing productivity and less time for developmental activities has changed the nature of promotions and created what we call "stealth promotions." These are promotions where you get additional authority and responsibility but your title, office space and other visible symbols of status frequently stay the same.

Traditional promotions still exist. They just do not happen as often. The typical successful career path usually contains several stealth promotions that build towards and culminate in a traditional promotion. Successful career planning requires that you manage these stealth promotions and situations well. If you do not understand how to do this, career management can be a very frustrating series of events. Here are some guidelines to follow in dealing with this new world:

1. Master your own job first. This is important on two levels. First, you are building a library of knowledge that will be invaluable in the future. Knowing all of the elements of each job and what caused you to be successful will help you in future jobs. Secondly, all successful people have a single attribute in common – they all have reputations for competence. This common trait of making things work well is critical. Don't be the company butterfly; flitting from job to job, tasting but never really fully understanding what you are doing.

2. Learn more, do more, add to your job. People are like trees. When they stop growing, they die. Take advantage of the situation you are in and learn as much as you can. Expand your job by adding new tasks and activities. This applies to all levels within the company. There is no such thing as knowing something too well or having too much knowledge. As you learn more and become more valuable to your department and the company, people will see you as someone with greater potential. Look upon each of these job expansions as a promotion, even if others do not.

There is a second, significant advantage to this attitude. Accumulating new skills and growing the value you bring to your unit or department can, by itself, lead to a promotion. Even if it does not, your reputation for being a self-starter and continually adding value will be remembered when new opportunities arise.

3. Experiment, try new things, see what you like and find out what you are good at. There are many ways to do this. Adding new responsibilities to your job is one. Another is to work on project teams or to get involved in activities outside the company. People always do their best work when they are doing something they enjoy and what they are good at. Knowledge is not everything. You have individual attributes and skills that you also need to consider. This is especially true if considering a job in management. Some people are excellent at leading people. Others excel when managing things and ideas. Do not get trapped in the wrong job.

4. Demonstrate success – Keep score. Most jobs come with a set of metrics that you must attain. If your job does not have them, because either it was overlooked or because it is new, it is critical that you build them and get them approved. They are essential in determining the importance and value of your position. This is important each year when budgets are created and critical when the company has periodic financial crises and looks for ways to reduce operating costs.

You also need these metrics to show how well you are doing your job. You need to be able to prove you are doing an excellent job and creating more and more value. You also need these metrics as a way of measuring whether changes you are making are actually improvements or not. Successful people are promoted faster than others. You need to prove you are successful.

5. Search out and solve problems. Curiosity, initiative and creativity are essential attributes for the ideal executive. As your career progresses you need to build these skills. Start by looking at your own job and what you do. Look for ways to do it faster, better, and cheaper. Then look at those positions or units that interact with your position or team. This will get you involved in process improvement and other productivity improvement techniques. Building these skills will be invaluable.

It will also help you create the image of being an employee who improves things. Having the reputation of being a problem-solver will open opportunities for growth and build alliances with key people who can be important to your career. The more people within the company who believe you are a person who deserves to be promoted, the more likely you will be promoted.

6. Volunteer for work outside your department. This is a great way to broaden your understanding of what is going on in other parts of the company. It is also a great way for key people outside your normal sphere of influence to meet you and see what you can do. The management within your department probably already has a good understanding of your skills and potential. Volunteering for projects or other opportunities in other departments broadens your sphere of influence and may create new opportunities.

You never know where the “really big” opportunity is. Another department may be looking for someone with just your abilities and skills set. Introduce yourself and show them what you can do.

7. Be willing and ready to create your own job. The best designed job starts with what the company, unit or team needs accomplished and then considers the strengths and abilities of the person who will be selected for the position. This blending of the ideal and practical is essential for the best result.

Most executive positions that are filled by people from outside the company are customized significantly to take advantage of the specific skills and abilities of the person selected. If this happens all the time when bringing in new people, why not do it for internal candidates? Having knowledgeable people within the company customize their jobs so they can be most effective is a trend that can create better results for you and your company.

Learning how to navigate in today’s business world is essential to successfully reach your full potential and to provide the most benefit to your company. We hope the suggestions in this letter help you. As you find other ways make your company more successful and earn rewards for yourself, please tell us about them. We’ll share your ideas with others so everyone can benefit.

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